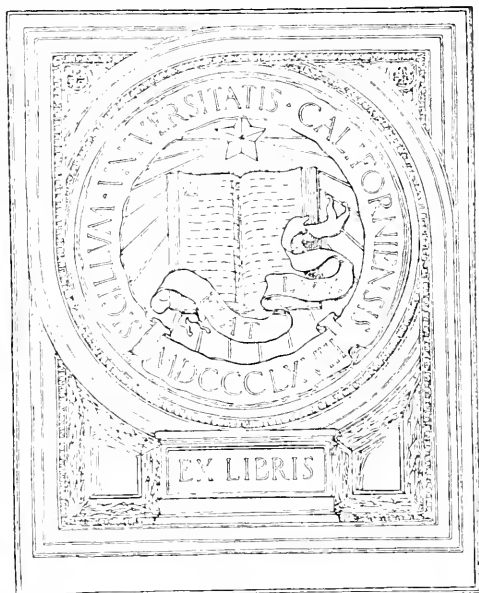


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California academy of sciences.
Doctor Hans Herman Behr.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES



ROBERT ERNEST COWAN

Doctor Hans Herman Behr

Born August 18, 1818

Died March 6, 1904

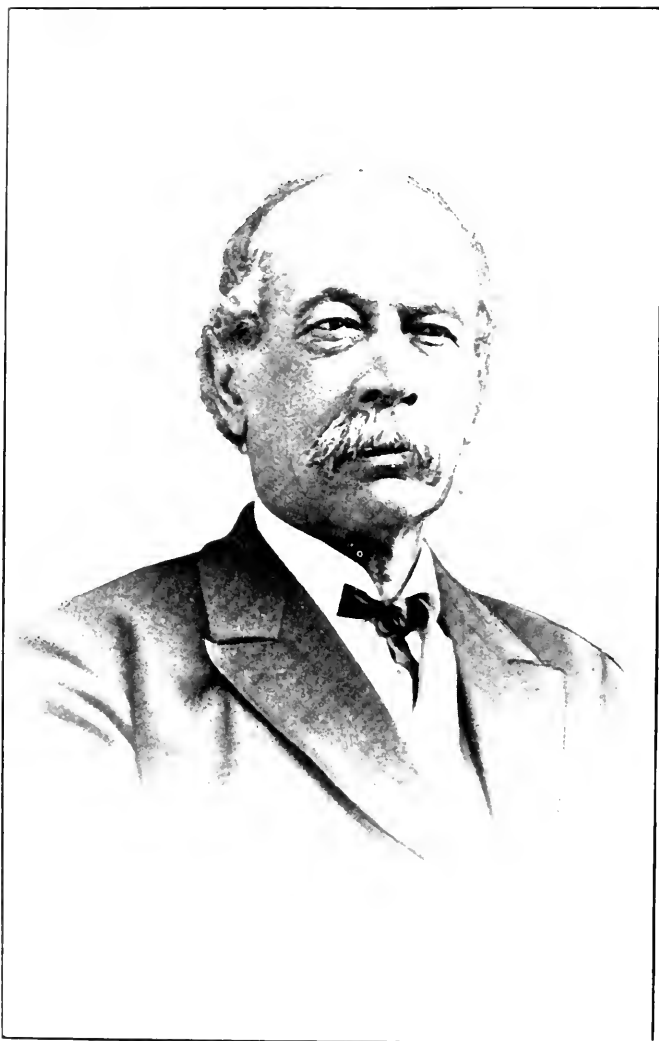
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1905







H. H. Bennett

*Report of the Committee Appointed to Prepare and
Present an Account of the Life and Services of*

DOCTOR HANS HERMAN BEHR

READ BEFORE THE
CALIFORNIA ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

March 21, 1904

HANS HERMAN BEHR, second vice-president of the California Academy of Sciences, died in San Francisco on March 6, 1904, at the age of eighty-five years and six months. By his death the Academy lost not only one of its oldest members but also one of its most active and successful workers in the field of natural sciences.

Doctor Behr was born on August 18, 1818, at Coethen, in the German duchy of Anhalt, where his family had for centuries been prominently connected with the administration of that principality.

After receiving a thorough classical education at an old and well known Latin school, he studied medicine and natural sciences at the universities of Halle, Wurzburg, and Berlin. At Berlin he passed his examinations, and in 1843 received the degree of doctor of medicine. In 1898, on the occasion of his eightieth birthday, this degree was renewed by the University of Berlin upon the recommendation of Behr's lifelong friend, Professor Rudolf Virchow. Such renewal was an exceptional honor for a German-American physician.

In 1844, encouraged by Alexander von Humboldt and the celebrated geographer, Karl Ritter, Doctor Behr went to Australia to study that then little known country and

the life of its aborigines. Among the natives he lived for some time, reporting the results of his studies in Virchow's 'Archiv', in the 'Lincee' of Professor Schlechtendahl, in 'Nature', and in other German scientific periodicals. His researches in botany and entomology, the sciences which later became his specialties, and his study of the language of the Australasians brought him into prominence among the workers in those fields and into lasting relations with many scientists of fame, notably the late Australian State-botanist, Baron Mueller of Melbourne. California is indebted to the friendship existing between Behr and Baron Mueller for the introduction of many valuable Australian plants.

From Australia Dr. Behr extended his travels to Java, the Straits-Settlements, the East Indies, and the Cape of Good Hope—always observing, collecting, and describing. It is readily understood that in those years such travels were made with less comfort and with greater risk to health and life than nowadays.

In 1847 he returned to Germany and commenced the practice of medicine at Coethen. However, he remained there but a year; for during the turmoils of the revolutionary year of 1848, his political views having brought him into antagonism with his family, he gave up his practice and undertook his second great voyage, journeying first to Brazil and other countries of South America, and thence to the Philippine Islands. There, in Manila, he remained for the next two years, practicing medicine and exploring the country. In his explorations he was greatly assisted by the information derived from several eminent scientists whom he found among the local Catholic clergy.

In 1851 he came to California, which he never again left except in 1853, when he made a journey to Germany in order to bring his Polish bride, Miss Agnes Onylska,

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to his San Francisco home. From this union, which unfortunately was soon severed by the death of the young wife, there were three children—two daughters, both of whom are now married and living in Coethen, and one son, Hans C. Behr, a mechanical engineer of more than ordinary ability, who lives at Johannesburg, South Africa, where he is in charge of some mining property.

Doctor Behr joined the Academy on February 6, 1854. The old records of the proceedings show how greatly the Academy was benefited by the admission of the new member. It was then less than a year old. Its founders, deeply impressed as they were with the importance of scientific research in this at that time unexplored state, were mostly amateurs, although by incessant study and devotion to science, some of them, like our late Doctor Kellogg, gradually attained an eminence where they ranked with the best. Into this group of worthy but little-schooled gentlemen came Behr with his thorough scientific training, his solid learning, his rich experience gathered during long and successful travels, and his ability to distinguish the truly new and interesting from observations and discoveries that had been made before. From California, which after centuries of obscurity had suddenly arisen to prominence and fame, the scientific world expected much; and it was largely due to the care of Doctor Behr that those hopes were not disappointed, and that only such discoveries were published as would command attention—a result not easy to accomplish among amateurs in danger of thinking the showy, popular side to be also the most important one.

Doctor Behr's learning and memory were truly surprising, and by no means limited to the branches of natural science which he had chosen as specialties. He was an excellent linguist, speaking six or more modern languages; he had made a deep study of comparative

philology, and of the mythology and theology of the East Indian cults; he had acquired a very good knowledge of Hebrew and Sanskrit, and was acquainted with the languages spoken by the Australian savages and by the Malays in Java and the Philippines, as well as with the tongues of the various branches of the great Slavonian nation. His scholarship in Greek and Latin was of much use to those who had discovered new species in botany or other sciences and who did not feel safe in their Latinity. Even eastern scientists often consulted him thereon, and were sometimes astonished at the blunders he discovered in their Græco-Latin make-ups. He frequently astounded his oldest friends by opening up to them a vein of knowledge on some subject with which they had never thought him to be familiar. Behr could and did say something interesting on almost every subject brought up for discussion at the meetings of our Academy. As he rarely missed a meeting during the half century of his membership (except during the last few years, when the infirmities of age prevented his attendance), we seldom missed hearing something interesting or instructive from him when others remained silent. Behr was always ready to help the younger or less informed members in their researches, and assisted hundreds of farmers, fruit-raisers, and gardeners in the manifold troubles which beset the cultivation of plants and trees in a new country. His correspondence on such points reached all over the Coast.

But while Behr was always kind, patient, and even indulgent to the searcher for information, he was a sworn enemy of all scientific humbug, of quacks and false pretenders. He did not make it his business to expose them, but he never refrained from expressing his opinion of them, quite regardless of person or station. Thus he did not fail to make some bitter enemies, to the great detriment of financial success in his profession. In the early



H. H. Bennett

days San Francisco was El Dorado not only for the miners, but also for so-called physicians who were in reality students who had failed to pass their examinations or former hospital-stewards or enterprising barbers, who had affixed unto themselves the doctor-title. Most of the regular physicians gave to these pretenders the benefit of the cloak of professional ethics. Behr never did and never hesitated to ridicule them. One of their number, who held sway in a local German paper because he wrote well and gratis, became Behr's furious enemy. He found nothing vulnerable in Behr's blameless life and solid knowledge. But Behr was a Catholic, and, for a modern scientist, had exceptionally strong religious feelings. This sufficed for his adversary, who charged him with being in secret affiliated with the Jesuits. He started in his paper the ever popular Lutheran pastime of Jesuit-baiting. For years every number contained a leader against the Jesuits, winding up with a denunciation of Doctor Behr as one of the most dangerous of them. It was a lie, but it worked well. Behr's patients, mostly honest but somewhat dull North German (and consequently Lutheran) grocers, butchers, and other tradespeople, who had been brought up in the belief that a Jesuit was the very twin-brother of the 'Gott-sei-bei-uns', left him; and he had to sell the land which he had secured at the corner of Bryant and Fifth streets, and start afresh to establish a practice among the more intelligent German residents. He revenged himself by pointing sarcastic arrows, which mutual friends never failed to wing to the target for which they were intended. For instance, discovering a particularly obnoxious louse, he named it after his enemy. Doctor Behr used to make light of the matter, but a week before his death he confessed to the writer how deeply he had suffered under those vile calumnies.

Nor did Behr's sharp and ready wit spare the political officials who were appointed by the State or Federal government to take charge of the botanical or entomological interests of California although they possessed but the flimsiest knowledge. In such matters he was brave to the point of recklessness. He would listen respectfully to the warnings of his friends, but he never followed them.

Although Doctor Behr was second to none in medical knowledge and kept well posted on the progress of medical science, it can not be said that he loved his profession. Still less did he understand the art, so highly developed among modern physicians, of making it pay. On receiving the degree of doctor of medicine, in accordance with an old mediæval custom, he had to take a Latin oath to help the needy sick without regard to remuneration. This oath he kept conscientiously.

But undoubtedly his happiest days were those when he escaped from his practice and made excursions into the neighboring counties in search of plants and butterflies. Experience had taught him never to go alone; so he always took along some trusty friend, a few members of the Academy, or some of his students after he became professor of botany at the Pharmaceutical College. Surely none who had the good fortune to go with him on those excursions will ever forget the genial old man, always witty, humorous, and ready to teach, and his almost childlike pleasure when he found a rare plant or insect. His medical friends probably envied him his courage in so frequently putting aside professional cares and possible emoluments; but as those relaxations contributed so largely toward keeping him in robust health and giving him so many years of life, he proved himself in the end the wisest of them all.

Behr's most beloved specialty, as is widely known, was the study of butterflies. He commenced collecting them

in early youth, and gradually gathered a large collection notable for the rarity, excellent preservation, and scientific arrangement of the specimens—a collection which if it were located nearer the centers of scientific exchange, say in London, would represent a value of thousands of dollars.

Over twelve years ago, when he retired from his medical practice, he presented this collection to our Academy with the understanding that it would be left under his care up to his death—he to receive the usual curator's salary. This agreement our boards of trustees have faithfully kept. It is one of the most gratifying returns from James Lick's bounty, that we have thus been enabled to grant to this worthy man and eminent scientist an ideal old age—an old age free from pecuniary care, venerated by friends in all walks of life, in scientific surroundings, with his collection about him (the life work so dear to his heart), within the walls of this Academy which he loved so well.

F. GUTZKOW,
GEORGE CHISMORE,
ALICE EASTWOOD,
Committee.



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